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PROGRAM CBS Evening News

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SUBJECT War Against the Nicaraguan Government

BOB SCHIEFFER: Ever since Nicaragua rebels based in Honduras launched their war against the Nicaraguan government last month, there have been charges of U.S. involvement. The Reagan Administration has refused to comment on the charges, but there is a U.S. presence in that fighting.

Tonight Bill McLaughlin, in Washington, concludes a two-part report on the counterinsurgency in Nicaragua.

BILL MCLAUGHLIN: The rebels who want to overthrow the Sandinista regime of Nicaragua call this training camp in Honduras the commando school. It is less than ten miles from the Nicaraguan border, one of several such camps now operating in Honduras.

A military instructor here, code name Francais (?), is one of the camp's happiest men. He's in charge of its storehouse, which these days overflows with brand-new weapons and equipment. Francais is proud of the quality and quantity of his military supplies.

FRANCAIS: For a guerrilla force, we have just about all the weapons we need.

MCLAUGHLIN: A close look at the labels on some of the boxes in the storehouse reveals some close-to-home names, like Brooklyn, New York; Havejill, Massachusetts; and Naples, Florida. CBS News has traced the serial numbers on some of the equipment shown here, backpacks, aluminum frames, tents, canvas gear, to firms in the U.S., who insist that it was sold directly to the Pentagon. Some of the weapons are also American-made.

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How all this equipment got from the Pentagon to Honduras for use in fighting a guerrilla war in Nicaragua is another question. Out in the jungles of Nicaragua, the anti-Sandinist rebels who actually do the fighting have an answer: U.S. support.

Calocho (?), who used to fight with the Sandinistas and is now trying to overthrow them. He says he was part of a group of 200 men who were trained by five American advisers in Honduras.

Calocho's leader is Commandante Bravo, the overall commander of an estimated five to eight hundred counterrevolutionary fighters in one province of northern Nicaragua. Bravo says American dollars transformed his ragtag band of fighters into an army almost overnight.

COMMANDANTE BRAVO [translated]: I am very happy that the people of the United States understand. After all, here are your dollars.

MCLAUGHLIN: If any of the equipment in the storehouse came directly from the Defense Department, if Bravo and Calocho are telling the truth, that they are being armed, trained and helped by the U.S. Government to overthrow the Sandinista regime, then the Reagan Administration is acting against the will of Congress as enacted into law.

The so-called Boland Amendment, which became law last December, specifically states, "None of these funds may be used by the Central Intelligence Agency or the Department of Defense for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Nicaragua."

Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of the Select Intelligence Committee says he's worried that the Reagan Administration may now be breaking the law.

SENATOR DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN: We are a government of laws. And I am sworn to uphold them and they -- the Administration has sworn faithfully to execute them. And we cannot have it any other way.

MCLAUGHLIN: Senator Christopher Dodd of the Foreign Affairs Committee believes it would be a mistake to support the rebels.

SENATOR CHRISTOPHER DODD: I think it's going to make it extremely difficult for any kind of moderate government to emerge in Nicaragua in the coming two decades.

MCLAUGHLIN: The Reagan Administration has refused to

confirm or deny reports that it is supporting these attempts to overthrow the Sandinista regime. But next week, when Congress reconvenes, several senators say they'll demand that the Reagan Administration explain exactly what it is doing in Honduras and what it is trying to do to Nicaragua.